

ANNALS OF OXFORD.

CHAPTER I.

THE CROSS KEYS.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE had not yet risen to the dignity of a whining schoolboy, with satchel and shining face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school. It had never occurred to him to hope that he might one day become as great a man as his father, and rise to be Alderman of Stratford. He was still only an infant, mewling and puking in his nurse's arms, when Oxford and Cambridge fell to quarrelling on the absurdest of all the absurd questions about which it was possible for them to lose their tempers, and rouse the laughter of bystanders.

It was an age of new devices and daring experiments; a period in which the leaders of our national opinion delighted in snapping the trammels of en-

feeble tradition, and substituting novel truth for antique falsehood. In every direction, and amongst every class of men, the prevailing tendency was to mistrust the old and extol the new. England had broken away from Rome, and was vexing her brain with scores of nice theological questions that were of recent origin or recent resurrection ; and, in every department of heroic endeavour and intellectual activity, her strongest and brightest sons were bent on improving upon the ways of their forefathers : and surpassing the folk of former time, when the two great seats of national learning, arguing as though to be old were of a necessity to be venerable, and acting as though senility were the fittest object of human ambition, began to squabble about their respective claims to honour on the score of antiquity.

The dispute itself was almost as ancient as the younger of the two institutions that now revived it, together with all the paltry passions and pedantic lies which the controversy had generated in the course of centuries. The Oxonians and Cantabs of the strictly feudal period were continually exchanging insults in Latin, and fabricating impudent statements about the comparative oldness or newness of their rival academies. To the Oxonian, who boasted an academic descent from Alfred the Great, the Cantab retorted by extolling the munificence with

which King Sigebert fostered letters on the banks of the Cam during a temporary depression of his royal fortunes. Whereto the irritated Oxonian, instead of deriding the claims of Sigebertus to a place on the roll of splendid literary patrons, in most cases replied by showing that, though Alfred achieved great things for learning at Oxford, it was not to be supposed that the Saxon monarch was the original founder of the university which enjoyed his affectionate patronage, or anything grander than the renovator and generous benefactor of certain schools which had flourished at Oxford generations before Cæsar condescended to conquer the ancient Britons. Bent on not being vanquished in this race into the past, the man of Cambridge would respond with an exasperating assumption of coolness that, though the ancient Britons were doubtless a people of respectable oldness, they were not everybody, and that it was beyond Oxford's power to name a single British king, prince, or chief, who had done for her schools so much as was achieved for Cambridge by the Spanish monarch Cantaber, who, during a period of compulsory absence from his revolutionary subjects, generously restored and enlarged those abodes of philosophy, which, it was almost needless to remark, had been planted in Cambridge long before the birth of Christ. Whereupon, falling back on the fictions of the *Historiola*, a miserable little paragraph, com-

piled by some scholastic boaster, somewhere about the fourteenth century, the Oxford disputant would speak of Cantaber's worth as measurable by any casual specimen of the cheap fruit of the fig-tree, and would ask who the Spaniard was that he could endure to be compared against the heroic Brute, who, together with his warlike Trojans, planted on our island (eleven hundred and eight years before Christ) the college of Greek philosophers, who taught grammar and wisdom at Greeklale, until they migrated to Bellositum, which had been a glorious university for centuries upon centuries ere the Saxons rechristened it Oxenford. Not unmindful that an old date was quite as easily assumed as a comparatively recent one, the Cambridge men, no less than the Oxonians, deemed themselves at liberty to select for the imaginary establishment of their university any time subsequent to the flood,—on creation's side of which event it would of course have been impious to fix the foundation of a thing that had not perished. There is historic authority, or rather, let us say, historian's authority, for the rather startling assertion, that Cambridge University was planted within two hundred years of the Deluge. 'Cœpit Cantabrigia,' Antiquarius wrote to Mr. Orator Masters, in an early year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, 'anno mundi 4321 ex nigro codice universitatis, in quo multa habes de origine Canta-

brigiensis Academiae. Ex aliis tamen libris vetustis, quos vidi, anno mundi 1829, et anno 3377, et 4095, et 3588, cœpisse intellexi.'

To return,---when little William Shakespeare was a creature of no great importance to any one in Stratford or elsewhere, with the exception of the woman whose maiden name was Mary Arden, this foolish contention broke out once again with a violence which is sometimes seen to distinguish the periodic exacerbations of moral distempers that have almost worn themselves out.

The row happened in this way.

Queen Elizabeth was a young sovereign : and one at least of her principal institutions was by no means old, when she found herself sitting on her mettlesome horse, and surrounded by a brilliant array of courtiers and military attendants, whilst she listened to an oration on her great virtues and the scholastic excellence of Cambridge, which William Masters, the University orator, delivered in the open air, and in the hearing of a dense multitude of scholarly persons. Her Majesty had a strong taste for public receptions and ceremonial processions. Rather than receive no one, she would---had it been her lot to live in these days---have insisted on receiving petitioners against the malt-tax and the compound householder. She liked to exercise her musical voice, and display at the same time her

learning and eloquence, in responding graciously to the addresses of her loyal people. If, on a gala day, she had found occasion to make a series of orations, in which she displayed successively her knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French, she went to rest thoroughly contented with her performances. Hence, on entering (August 5, 1564) the university, which had Orator Masters for its official spokesman, she was engaged on business which disposed her to be more than ordinarily amiable. It was her custom to smile on the multitudes that flocked to cheer her on public occasions : and having journeyed to Cambridge with the beneficent and politic purpose of affording encouragement to the students and orderly divines of an ancient university, she was especially desirous to win the approval of her entertainers. Had William Masters been a less competent mouth-piece of a learned corporation, she would have listened to him with patience and a well-bred air of satisfaction, knowing that her time for speaking would soon come, and that by evincing critical approval of the university's Latin address, she would put the university in the best possible humour to applaud her Latin reply.

Nor was William Masters a speaker that stood in need of his sovereign's forbearance and courtesy. A man of fine presence and voice, no less masterful in nature and aspect than in name and academic stand-

ing. he was highly qualified for the ceremonial duties of his office; and the Queen had no sooner reined her steed backwards, and looked at the speaker, standing on the elevation of the entrance to a college chapel, than she knew him to be no mere collegiate bookworm. At a period when the mediæval habit of travelling had been relinquished to a great extent by his countrymen, William Masters had travelled in France and Italy, and could converse in the tongues of those countries as gracefully and fluently as in the language of ancient Rome; and the man's air and tone, according with his culture and favourable experiences, proclaimed that, notwithstanding the abundance and exactness of his erudition, he was less a scholar of the cloisters than a student of the world.

By smiles and movements of her hands,—benignant demonstrations of which Elizabeth, conscious of her smile's power and her hand's delicacy, was commendably profuse,—the Queen testified her approval of the orator, and intimated her concurrence in the bursts of applause that rent the air, when—acting from malice prepense, or carried away by excitement into 'taller talk' than the occasion required or prudence warranted—William Masters informed his 'excellentissima princeps' that all historians who touched on the matter, concurred in showing that Oxford, if not a mere mushroom in comparison with

Cambridge, was much less ancient than the university which she was glorifying with her presence :—*Sed sive ad hunc, sive ad illum authorem referatur, illud constet inter omnes, Oxoniensi Academia nostram multis esse annis antiquiorem.*"

When Elizabeth, keenly relishing the acclamations which aided the course of her eloquence by checking it, replied to the address, she stimulated the enthusiasm of the scholars by appointing their official talker, and declaring her concurrence with all that had fallen from his lips : and after '*excellētissima princeps*' had passed onwards, the undergraduates and multitude of humble scholars dispersed in the gayest of good humours to their respective halls, where strong beer and sack were served out to them liberally in celebration of the sovereign's presence in their university. With noisy mirth they drank long life to her highness ; and having grown weary of extolling the Queen, who was strong enough to be her own pope, the students congratulated themselves on the pluck and thoroughness with which their orator had spoken up for Cambridge, and stated precisely the historic truth respecting her antiquity.

It may be that Orator Masters, speaking under the stimulus of applause, and carried away by delight at his own success, gave the reins to his tongue without taking any more thought for the

probable effect of his utterances on sensitive Oxonians than Mr. Disraeli took for the feelings of his supporters, when, in his famous Edinburgh speech, he mentioned with comic earnestness the pains it had cost him to educate his party to adopt new views. But I am disposed to impute deliberate malice to the subtle talker, and to think that he meant his words to occasion all the ferment and fury to which they gave rise on the banks of the Isis, and in the household of almost every married Oxonian, morbidly jealous for the honour of his university.

If I am right in this estimate of the orator's motives he soon had abundant cause to congratulate himself on the success of his assertions, which were speedily conveyed to every quarter of the kingdom on the dispersion of the multitude that had received them with riotous delight. Before the rise and general diffusion of newspapers, our ancestors, habitually relying on oral intelligencers for their information about current events, were influenced by rumour and gossip to an extent which it is difficult for Victorian Englishmen to imagine. A statement made by an official speaker, and noised abroad by trustworthy reporters, had, upon the public opinion of Old England, all the effect that now-a-days follows from a powerful article, or report of an important speech, disseminated by a newspaper

of large circulation. The system of diffusing news by word of mouth was, moreover, attended with annoyance and injury, of which we know comparatively little, in these days of rival journals, ever on the alert to correct the errors, and counteract the unjust declarations, of their competitors. Under any circumstances Orator Masters's derisive mention of Oxford's newness would have occasioned irritation to thin-skinned Oxonians, aware that, proceeding from the lips of an eminent scholar and academic chief, it would prejudicially affect men's estimate of the university, until it should be no less authoritatively contradicted. But the insult was peculiarly galling to them, on account of the impossibility of making without delay an adequate refutation of its mis-statements. Having no journals in which to publish a counterblast to the Cambridge calumniator, the Oxonians were constrained to nurse their wrath in silence against the arrival of a day favourable to their exercise of the right of reply.

A suitable occasion for the exercise of that right occurred in September 1566, a little more than two years after the delivery of the Cambridge oration, when Elizabeth, in her queenly solicitude for the interests of learning and true religion, irradiated Oxford with her presence. The opportunity had come; and all Oxonians concurred in thinking that Thomas Key (scholastically spelt 'Caius') was the

RIGHT OF REPLY.

man to make the most of it in their university's behalf. A gentleman, whose not faultless latinity was highly approved by his Oxford contemporaries, Thomas Key had in former time been chosen to be University Registrar, in consideration of his oratorical and literary faculties, 'for in his time, and long before,' as Antony à Wood informs us, 'it was commonly the Registrarie's office to speech it before, and with epistles (as the orator doth now) to great personages.' That he had been removed from this honourable post was in no respect due to any failure of his special endowments, but to his official negligence, arising out of a moral infirmity, to which an allusion is made in the biography that describes him as 'being besotted with a certain crime, which he could not avoid till old age cured it.' After his removal from the Registrar's place, this master of Latin prose was made a prebendary of Sarum, and raised to govern University College, the house that was formerly credited with the honour of having been founded by the great Alfred. As a consummate artist in Latin phrases, and the chief of Alfred's royal college, Thomas Key (scholastically spelt 'Caius') was called upon to take pen in hand, and deprive Orator Masters of peace of mind for the rest of his days.

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accepted the invitation without misgiving, and did his utmost to justify his friends' choice: but the historian's obligations compel me to say that his endeavours were not perfectly successful. In seven days he produced a turgid and insolent little pamphlet, the opening sentence * of which asserts that Alfred founded University College, but intimates that the Prince was no more than the restorer of the university. The shortness of the time consumed in the composition of this essay is mentioned by Antony à Wood as a remarkable illustration of the writer's literary aptitude and quickness; but to *litterateurs* of the present epoch the production of thirty-five loosely-printed pages of Latin prose in seven days does not appear an achievement to be wondered at. The majority of the undergraduates now resident at Oxford could easily surpass Thomas Key's performance, both in speed and quality of workmanship; and the Victorian scholar who, on undertaking to write a Latin

* Collegium Universitatis, quod primum magna universitatis aula appellabatur, ab optimo pariter et doctissimo principe Alphredo, qui et Alfredus dicitur, ex quatuor Ethelwolphi Vicisaxonum Regis filiis natu minimo, Vanatingi in Bercheriensî provincia nato, circa annum Domini 873, primo, vel secundo ad summum post initum ab eo principatum, anno fundatum esse constat, quo videlicet tempore in Academiæ nostræ instaurationem, quam bona scriptorum pars *foundationem* vocat, totis viribus incumbibat.—Vide *Assertio Antiquitatis Oxoniensis Academice*.

essay, should produce an article as ineffectual and faulty as the Elizabethan master's demonstration of Oxford's antiquity, would not win the respect of any numerous body of classical students.

That Thomas Key's 'Assertio Antiquitatis Oxoniensis Academiae' appeared a creditable performance to his contemporaries is one of the several facts which show to how low a level scholarship had fallen at Oxford before the opening of Elizabeth's reign. The work of an angry pedant, it is surcharged with the pompous insolence of a pedagogue scolding a group of terrified children. Instead of questioning the accuracy and discretion of Leland, the Cambridge orator should have substantiated his own rash assertions by producing at least one of those witnesses of whom he talked so grandly. The orator of Cambridge imagined that Oxford men were birds, tiny birds, to be scared by shadows and scarecrows. But the orator would find out his mistake, if he ventured to defend his egregious blunders. For Oxonians were no timorous birds, but lions* rather, who would repay with terrible

* Imo vero (ut ingenue quod sentio dicam) arbitror. Oratorem ipsum tum existimationi, tum causæ suæ, melius consulturum fuisse, si omissa, quam in Leylandum instituerat, accusatione, vel unico saltem ex tam multis approbatæ fidei testibus, quos pro se facere asseverat, assertionem suam confirmasset. Sed quando id non facit, sed ad ea potius digreditur, quæ ad institutum minus pertinent, quid aliud hic suspicari possumus, quam quod nos in-

vengeance the insults put upon them. In this strain Thomas Key fumed, and foamed, and rated his adversary; and when the champion of Oxford's antiquity had stated his case thus injudiciously, he published his argument in the form of a miserable little pamphlet, abounding in clerical and printer's errors, and lacking a title.

For a time the Oxonians were well pleased with their defender's Assertion, a printed copy of which her highness the Queen had been graciously pleased to accept, whilst other printed copies of the work had been prepared for circulation throughout the kingdom. The Cambridge orator had been answered, refuted, nailed against the gate of Fame's temple, an object for perpetual derision. The Cantabs were ruffled alike at the universities and in the cathedral closes; it was thought that Orator Masters and his abettors had received sharp punishment. Oxford was jubilant.

But, fortunately for the Cantabs and untowardly for the Master of University College, it happened that if Oxford could boast a Thomas Key (spelt

anibus tantum verborum terriculamentis a veri defensione deterrere conetur? avium fortassis similes existimans, quæ umbras et stramentitias hominum figuras reformidare solent. Ut si errorem illum suum defendere perget, videat, ne Leones experiatur, quos nunc, ut meticulosas aves et aviculas, contemnit.'—Vide *Assertio Antiquitatis Oxoniensis Academiæ*.

learnedly 'Caius'), Cambridge numbered amongst her representative men a John Key (also spelt learnedly 'Caius'). Whilst Thomas ruled his Oxford house, John governed the Cambridge College which he enriched with his wealth and illustrated with his name. Biography does not inform us that they were near relatives; but whilst the proximity of the counties, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, which gave them birth, favours the supposition that Thomas of Lincolnshire and John of Norwich were of the same familiar stock, the bitterness with which they quarrelled justifies a suspicion that they were brothers. Like Thomas of Oxford, the Cambridge Key was a man of letters and a notable author; and in addition to his literary distinctions, he possessed the repute of being a man of science, a learned physician, and one of the wittiest talkers of his day. In Elizabethan England it would have been difficult to find a more brilliant and accomplished gentleman than the court physician and Cambridge don whose memory is perpetuated in Caius College. With tongue and pen he could hold his own against the best talkers and writers of the clerical order. As President of the College of Physicians, and a practitioner who had successively officiated as physician to Edward the Sixth, Mary, and Elizabeth, he was the chief of the medical profession. Affluent in purse, he was also rich in friends; and whilst

epigram and persiflage flowed from his lips in a continual stream, he was justly extolled for kindness and courteous dignity of manner. Not that he was faultless. He was an excellent gentleman, and—as Thackeray remarked of the British matron, to her enduring displeasure—he knew it. The man who designed his own tomb and monument, which have for their modest inscription the words, ‘*Vivit post Funera Virtus, Fui Caius,*’ must have been sufficiently conscious that Dr. John Key was a personage altogether out of the common way in respect of moral excellence.

It was an evil day for Thomas Key, of University College, Oxford, when Dr. John Key, of Cambridge, took up his pen in Orator Masters’s behalf, and answered the answerer in a work dear to remote generations of Cambridge men, and entitled, ‘*De Antiquitate Cantabrigiensis Academiae Libri Duo. In quorum secundo De Oxoniensis quoque Gymnasii Antiquitate Disseritur. Et Cantabrigiense longe eo antiquius esse definitur. Londinensi Authore.*’ In historical insight and demonstration, Dr. John Key’s work is not more valuable than the performance which evoked it; but in style, humour, pungency, the Cambridge physician’s treatise contrasts favourably against the Oxford pamphlet. If the foolish contention did no other good, we may be thankful to it for giving us in the ‘*De Antiquitate*’ a charac-

teristic example of the way in which the scholastic magnates of Elizabethan England bantered and 'chaffed' one another with ponderous Latinity. A merry twinkle brightens the doctor's eye, and a mischievous devilry curls his lips and ripples his jolly visage with pleasant smiles, as he regrets to say that a grievous controversy has arisen between a certain Oxonian and the Cambridge orator, between a certain man who thinks himself a master and another who has declared his intention to behave like a lion; and as he, in concern for the evils which may flow to the state from so calamitous a contention, unfolds to us his purpose of taking a strictly impartial view of the arguments and evidence on both sides, and of deciding the quarrel of the disputants with the nicest attention to the requirements of justice. It is not to be imagined that he is a Cambridge man. No such thing. He is a Londoner. '*homo Londinensis, medio loco inter utrumque positus*;' and as a dispassionate arbitrator, moderator, judge, he is just the person to mitigate annoyance, allay spites, and lure the wranglers back to desirable friendliness. It would be a scandal to the universities, and a perpetual triumph to the enemies of learning, should the Master use his cane on the lion, or the lion turn upon the Master with tooth and claw,* and rend him

* '*Gravis controversia orta est inter Oxoniensem quendam et Cantabrigiensem oratorem, de antiquitate utriusque Academiæ,*

to pieces. It is clearly a case for a mild, placable, and sincere friend of both parties to the war to interfere with soothing courtesies and conciliatory explanations.

After this sprightly and ironical exordium ‘*Londonensis*’—whose *nom de plume* of course neither concealed the real author of the essay nor mitigated the annoyance of his adversary—proceeded to pass judgment on the two contendents in a manner no less satisfactory to Orator Masters than offensive to the Master of University College. And, in order that he might omit nothing which could aggravate the *Oxonian*’s fury, he published his treatise together with the pamphlet which it ridiculed, and, having conferred on the reprint the title that henceforth designated the essay, enriched it with numerous marginal annotations that were by no means calculated to make Thomas Key a happier man. In short, the doctor did everything which the most bilious of

*gravior futura si lis non componatur. Nam alter quum se Masterum putet, alter se Leonem futurum dicat, et dente ungueque superbus confidat, metus est, rem alter re fuste transigat, si intractabilis esse alter pergat: alter oculos aut ungue cruat, aut dente crudeliter laceret, ni ille omnino conticescat. At quum Academiae omnium virtutum matres sint, omnis pietatis et officii alumnae denique atque oculi Regum quibus videant, et capita quibus sapiant et intelligant, Reipublicae gravis noxa futura esset, si vim alterutra pateretur.’—Vide *De Antiquitate Cantabrigiensis Academiae*.*

Elizabethan reviewers could have achieved for the humiliation of a literary rival, without violating the rules of superficial courtesy and fair fight which scholars of the period were expected to observe in disputation.

The '*De Antiquitate Cantabrigiæ Academiæ*' was a chief plank and principal nail in Thomas Key's coffin. No sooner had the Master of University College perused the caustic treatise, published in 1568, than he wrote in reply his '*Examen judicii Cantabrigiæ ejusdam, qui se Londinensem dicit, nuper de origine utriusque Academiæ lati*;' but though this answer was circulated in manuscript, it seemed advisable to the author and his friends that it should not be put in type. Already an aged man when the '*De Antiquitate*' appeared, Thomas Key, labouring under a painful consciousness of defeat, passed the remnant of his days in dejection; and having breathed his last in the university and college whose honour he had asserted, he was buried in the church of St. Peter-in-the-East, Oxford, just one year and two months before John Key was interred in the chapel of Caius College.

The time has long gone when Latin treatises on the antiquity of the universities were deemed choice reading by the inmates of colleges and the clergy of cathedral towns. Two centuries and twenty-five years have passed over the grave of Brian Twyne,

keeper of the archives of Oxford, who earned bright renown in his day by his '*Antiquitatis Academiae Oxoniensis Apologia*.' Nearly two hundred years have been added to the Christian era since Dean Fell, of Christchurch, and his fellow-conspirators translated into the language of the schools Antony à Wood's '*History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*,' to the pretended end that the fame of their university 'might be better known and understood beyond the seas,' but really, in order that they might gratify a pedantic taste by reading in comparatively inexpressive and pointless Latin what the historian had recorded in apt and characteristic English. Four human generations have slipped away • since Thomas Hearne published, in two volumes, the particulars of the Clarendon controversy, together with certain other of such literary waifs and strays as the enthusiastic antiquary delighted to preserve from destruction. And at this present time, I question if erudition and scholarship of the most learned 'don' to be found in Oxford, would procure him readers, or save him from ridicule, if he were to employ them on the composition of a Latin assertion of his university's right, by reason of her superior age, to regard Cambridge as her inferior.

But the sentiment which inspired Orator Masters and the rival Keys in this preposterous strife about nothing cannot be said even yet to be utterly extinct.

It was only the other day that my good old friend Harold Pierrepont, Canon of Babraham and Rector of Whittlebury, withdrew his subscription from the county paper, of which he had been a reader for more than forty years, because the new editor, departing from the ancient and orthodox usage of the journal, in his announcements of university intelligence, gave Cambridge the precedence over Oxford, in deference to what may be termed the alphabetical principle. 'The fellow who can do that,' said Harold hotly, 'would do anything;' and forthwith he wrote to the office of the 'Babraham Guardian' a letter which the proprietor will not speedily forget.

But then, Harold is of an expiring school, and delights to stand stubbornly on ancient ways. To this day he maintains that port is the only wine fit for a gentleman to drink, and persists in reading the office for King Charles the Martyr every thirtieth of January in Whittlebury Church.

CHAPTER II.

KING ALFRED'S EXPULSION FROM OXFORD.

THE great Samuel Johnson--the one supreme doctor who was his own prophet and had James Boswell for a biographer--is recorded to have remarked jocularly to a clerical friend that there were 'inexcusable lies and consecrated lies.' The stupendous fiction, with all its brood of confirmatory fibs, which for centuries caused the Saxon Alfred to be regarded as an Oxonian, was certainly no inexcusable lie, for it seems to have sprung, and certainly drew strength and substance, from a desire to glorify learning and exalt the scholar's vocation. Nor can it be classified with unconsecrated lies, if time and the sanction of sages can impart sacredness to a piece of historic romance.

But, notwithstanding the goodness of its purpose and the length of the period during which it passed for truth, the princely fabrication has lost its grandeur and splendour, and dwindled to the proportion and quality of an old wife's tale. Like the story of his

residence in the neatherd's hut, the narrative of the Saxon monarch's doings amongst the dons has fallen into disrepute. Driven from his college in the seventeenth and expelled from the university in the nineteenth century, the royal adventurer may be said to have quitted Alma Mater without a degree, and has so sunk in general estimation, that men would hear, without surprise, that he had no better title to his crown than to his reputation in the schools. Not that the fiction has utterly perished from the fond delusions which continue to charm the imaginations of men. There is a marvellous vitality in lies; and it cannot be doubted that centuries hence English children will burn their fingers with the Prince's cakes and that schoolboys will regard the neatherd's guest with mingled reverence and distrust as the patron of schoolmasters and ancientest of college tutors. But, by all persons who have looked into the facts of the case with minds competent to draw just conclusions from matters to which they give attention, it is universally admitted that the schools in which Alfred was long believed to have fostered learning on the banks of the Isis and the lustre which his patronage was supposed to have shed on those restored seminaries, are nothing more than the air-castles and romantic moonshine which certain monkish and other speculators on human credulity called into existence at a

time when feudal rule and ecclesiastical discipline had so drilled and subjugated our ancestors, that they were prone to regard every social institution as the work of a particular potentate, and could not conceive it possible for a collection of schools to become greatly prosperous and influential unless some chief of Church or State had contrived it, set it going, and granted it permission to prosper.

The fabrication consisted of two main inventions, each of which had its subordinate misrepresentations and distinct groups of subsidiary lies. There was the assertion, that Alfred had founded or restored a school, or schools, at Oxford; and there was the assertion, that University College, in the High Street of the University town, was the particular 'domus' which he had enriched by his munificence, and consecrated by his presence, and in which his soul had delighted beyond all other places of learning. Which is the older of these two main inventions I will not undertake to say positively. The more general story of Alfred's connexion with Oxford may have preceded the particular assertion of his connexion with University College; but as the only reputable authority for the first-mentioned of the two statements is a writer, who flourished when University College had been about a century in existence, and had moved from its original quarters to its present ground in the High Street, known facts do not forbid us to suspect

that, instead of appropriating and converting to its own honour a tradition which had long floated about the university, the college may have originated the entire Aluredian romance in which it was for centuries permitted to be the central point of interest.

Volumes of learned pedantry have been written, and tempers innumerable have been irretrievably ruined, in controversies about the question whether Alfred was the veritable founder of this particular house, and whether he had more than any man in the moon to do with the university. It is not my purpose to bore the reader by recounting the arguments and counter-arguments, the statements and counter-statements, of Alfred's friends and enemies. On the contrary it is my most grateful task to liberate mankind from every obligation to trouble their heads about a vain dispute. But whilst counselling all persons who wish well to themselves to regard all books, pamphlets, and articles about the Oxonian Alfred as so much waste paper, I may, in justice, rather than enmity, to a particular 'domus,' be permitted to say that, without committing myself to any irrevocable opinion on the question, I incline to regard University College as the source of the entire matter of controversy. Nor need the college at this date blush to admit the friendly impeachment of its veracity in past times. The fabrication, which I impute to its authorities of ancient date, had the merits of daring, completeness,

and a just appreciation of the dimensions and nature of human credulity. Its details were in the highest degree artistic; and in the way of groundless assertion it unquestionably was what our American cousins would designate 'a big thing.'

Not in the order of their origin, about which I know nothing, but in the order of their demolition, about which there is no uncertainty, each of the main fabrications shall be taken for a few moments under notice.

Founded when Alfred had been more than three hundred and fifty years in his grave, University College had occupied its present site in the High Street about forty years, when it was drawn into litigation with one Edmund Francis, a citizen of London, concerning certain lands and tenements in or near Oxford. The said Edmund Francis not only fought the college, but gave such proofs of strength and a determination to fight to his last broad-piece, that in alarm and subtlety the collegiate men resolved to win the king's favourable opinion and support by laying their case before him, together with assurances that their college ought to be a special object of concern to his royal care, since it had been founded by his great precursor of Saxon time, and had been the home of St. John of Beverley, the Venerable Bede, and divers other sages, who had been sleeping under ground for centuries, ere ever it occurred to William

of Durham, in the thirteenth century, to devote his wealth to the erection and maintenance of a scholastic house. Drawn in the French of the period by a scribe who was certainly equal to his task, their petition was sent to Richard the Second, in the seventh year of his reign, and in due course found its way to the Tower of London.

It is noteworthy—not to say ‘suspicious’—that when inquiries were made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respecting the origin of and authority for the story of Alfred’s Oxford doings, the strongest evidence which could be adduced in its behalf was a spurious passage in William Camden’s edition of the pseudo-Asser’s ‘Life of Alfred,’ of which publication (printed and put forth during the full heat of an Alfredian row) the editor, when pressed on the subject by Brian Twyne, could give no better account than that it was the reproduction of a manuscript which he ‘took to be written about K. Richard the Second his time.’ As my good friend Sledgehammer, of the criminal bar, would observe in his proper place, it is remarkable that the spurious passage in the spurious ‘Life of Alfred,’ and the petition in which the authorities of University College first appear as claimants of Alfred for their founder, were literary productions of the same period—*if* reliance may be put on Camden’s word given to Brian Twyne, and on his critical opinion of the age

of the manuscript from which he printed his edition of the pseudo-Asser's historic fiction. This coincidence of dates, from which more than one inference can be drawn, has been overlooked by writers about the pseudo-Asser forgeries. Of course it is only a coincidence. But, as Sledgehammer is continually remarking in the fearless discharge of duty, coincidences are the trifling things which decide whether *men are to be killed at the gallows or left to the slower death of living on.*

With remissness that will occasion surprise to none who know her well, History has omitted to record what effect the collegiate petition had on the contention between the scholars and Edmund Francis : but without her guidance we may be sure that, if the members of William of Durham's foundation were instigated by dishonest policy to weave into their petition an altogether imaginary account of their college, they lost no time in learning to believe the fiction to which they had given utterance. Henceforth it became their duty to sustain their alleged connexion with the Saxon king by frequent reiteration of the fable, and to live up to their pretensions, even as domestic ambition in the middle class of present society, after starting its carriage, is at pains to bear itself consistently with the new equipage. Whatever of untruthfulness may have attended its birth, the statement soon acquired

the credence of Oxonians ; and for many a generation the sophist would have been accused of disloyalty to his university who had ventured to lessen the honour of the college by throwing doubt on its favourite tradition. In Henry the Sixth's time, when the college enlarged its quarters and formed itself into a hollow square, it did not omit to commemorate St. John of Beverley and the royal Alfred by placing their portraitures in windows of splendid glass. The snob of to-day resembles closely the snob of feudal time ; and from what we see of men in Pall-Mall clubs we can infer that, besides the pleasure which they took in the ancientness of their imaginary descent, the men who paid for those glass windows found an egotistic delight in bragging about the royalty of their academic pedigree. Certain it is that for many a day William of Durham was an insignificant personage in the domus which his wealth had erected, in comparison with the saint and sovereign whom it was the humour of its fellows to extol as their chief benefactors. On gaudy days and pompous anniversaries the real founder was commended for his generosity and care in restoring what had not been begun till several years had passed over his grave ; but the choicest flowers of enthusiastic and reverential eloquence were lavished on the imaginary founder by orators, who, if they had been half as civil to the man whose

liberality had given them their home and stipends as they were to men to whom they were indebted for nothing, would have been in no degree deficient in apparent thankfulness to the benefactor who furnished them with a foundation to swagger upon.

The doubts respecting Alfred's alleged right to be extolled for founding University College—doubts which had sprung or gained strength from the Elizabethan controversy concerning the antiquity of the two seats of learning—were exchanged for certainty in the later half of the seventeenth century by the strangest and least agreeable creature that ever rendered important service to English literature.

A large, lean, gaunt man, with a sour face, stooping shoulders, and shambling gait—Antony Wood had a sharp, spiteful temper that in no way belied the querulous expression of a countenance which was forbidding without being misshapen. Possessing no intellect that qualified him for higher work than the labour of grubbing and ferreting through old parchments for facts of comparatively small importance, he spent his life in the congenial toil of an antiquary, surrounded by materials adapted to his peculiar kind of curiosity. And it cannot be affirmed that he laboured to no purpose. By turns a sagacious recorder of accurate investigations and a greedy devourer of old wives' tales, he has pro-

duced books whose errors of knowledge, judgment, temper, do no harm, and sometimes yield amusement, whilst their redundance of reliable information is of daily service to the historian and biographer. Of a man who worked so resolutely and beneficially it may seem ungracious to speak with disrespect; but there is no obligation to exhibit generosity to the scribe who avenged private affronts by the cruel use of a poisoned pen, and never hesitated to asperse his political opponents with malicious accusations or insolent invective. Bare justice is alone due to the annalist who was signally deficient in fairness to others, and who, without the excuse of religious fervour, was such a virulent partisan that he could not mention Thomas Owen's interment in the Bunhill-Fields Cemetery without explaining that the graveyard was 'the new burying-place for fanatics.'

But hard though it is to deal generously with the man who was maliciously ungenerous to every one he disliked, it is much easier to laugh at poor Antony than to be angry with him. Sitting in his solitary, ill-furnished, comfortless chamber, amidst piles of worm-eaten folios and chests of parchments; or prying about the shelves of the Oxford booksellers, into whose shops he was wont to sneak whilst the colleges were at dinner, and he was not likely to encounter groups of boisterous undergraduates, ready to extract fun from his shyness

and awkwardness ; or stealing out at nightfall, after a hard day's work, to eat in a cheap tavern the supper, which under ordinary circumstances was almost the only nutriment that he allowed himself in the twenty-four hours ; or sitting in sullen silence over 'his pipe and pot' in the common room of 'some by-ale-house in town,' or village beer-shop — he is such a grotesque object that to look at him, and at the same time refrain from laughter, is an impossibility for the observer who, whilst regarding his ill-favoured aspect and miserable apparel, recalls his peevish, boorish, snarling slanders against the ladies who dared to find homes under collegiate roofs.

Rumour, fully justified by many passages of his writings, put it about that the ill-clad and unsocial bookworm, notwithstanding his academic robe and degree, was a Papist : and in spite of the pains which his friends, I mean his associates—I beg his pardon, for he had no friends—took to demonstrate that he died within the pale of the Anglican Church, I am disposed to think that rumour did not greatly wrong the perverse, crotchety, cantankerous annalist, who deplored Edward the Sixth's disastrous reign, extolled Mary's beneficent rule, and became more than ordinarily morose and gloomy when he recalled the circumstances of Elizabeth's accession. Not that I credit him with any kind of genuine devoutness, or pay him the compliment of supposing that at any

period of his life he would have given away an old coat to help the Pope's cause. His attachment to Catholic opinion was nothing higher than an antiquary's preference for the older of the only two creeds about which he knew anything. His hatred of Nonconformists was cordial, but his virulence against them arose altogether from the occurrences which made him regard them as fanatics who, in their disrespect for old things, were likely to pull down all the colleges of the kingdom, and burn the contents of their innermost rooms. To his one-sided intellect Protestantism appeared an influence opposed to antiquarian interests—an influence prone, in periods of frenzy, to destroy old books, ancient manuscripts, obsolete furniture, rare seals, and other articles of first importance to a collector of time-stained curiosities; and therefore Antonius à Bosco (as Antony would style himself at moments of rare hilarity) disliked Protestants and their deplorably ruinous ways of protesting.

The life of such an Oxford graduate, in times which witnessed the abolition of episcopacy and were incessantly troubled by religious zealots, had no lack of vexations and crosses. Annoyances would, under any circumstances, have met poor Antony at every turn; but, in addition to inevitable grievances, his temper created for him enemies on all sides. If he treated the world scurvily, the world had its

revenge ; and in his later days the laborious, baffled, embittered man of letters was about as unhappy a being as could have been found in all England. His expulsion from the university, to illustrate whose grandeur had been the chief task of his industrious career, must have cut him to the quick. He was afflicted with a malady that did not kill him until it had subjected him to the sharpest tortures. Worse still, he had a patron who extorted from him a reluctant consent that the 'History and Antiquities of Oxford' should be published in a learned tongue, and who then caused the author's pleasant English to be rendered inaccurately into decidedly unpleasant Latin. What with academic disgrace, strangury, and a patron, Antonius à Bosco suffered almost as much as he deserved.

Like most persons with a taste for communicating disagreeable news to their neighbours, Antonius gained credit for being a respec^ter and lover of the truth ; though I am inclined to think that his love of truth was little else than a malicious delight in unearthing and proclaiming matters to the annoyance of individuals against whom he bore either a special grudge or the general ill-will which he cherished for nearly everybody. Had he been an M.A. of University College, instead of Merton, it is probable that he would not have troubled himself to demonstrate the fabulous nature of the stories which

represented the former house as the work of Alfred's hands. But the antiquary of Merton—a college only a trifle younger than the house which boasted loudly of its royal founder—had so long writhed under and resented the pretensions of William of Durham's men, that it would be absurd to imagine him animated by mere love of truth, when he put it clearly before the world that Merton College had taken up its present position ere ever University College had entered the High Street, and certainly within a very few years of the time when William of Durham's will first yielded fruit to certain scholars of the university; and that the recipients of the said William's benefactions had not occupied their abode in the High Street for half a century, when they had the effrontery to affirm that Alfred had laid its foundations for their advantage.

For a short time after administering this buffet to the 'senior filia universitatis,' the antiquary was a happy man; but soon the rose of his triumph was found to have a thorn which had inflicted an incurable wound on the hand that had rashly plucked it. To chuckle over the fable of University College was very pleasant; but Antonius à Bosco was by no means willing to relinquish his share in a scholastic association with the great Alfred. Since he had turned the king out of the college, was it not possible that further investigations would result in the monarch's ejection from the university, — an event

that would dim the lustre of the academy, throw doubt on every antique part of her not robust pedigree, and provoke the derision of jealous Cantabrigians. Clinging to the Aluredian fables for the honour of the university, whilst he derided those of them that tended only to the glorification of the house that was Merton's superior in antiquity, Antony strove to preserve his faith in what he knew to be fictitious. Of course the effort was not perfectly successful; and in a significant passage of his history of Oxford, with a doleful air and a whine that are inexpressibly comic, the poor man remarks concerning Alfred, 'That he either restored or founded the schools at Oxford, are not wanting many authors that support it, but they being not ancient (I mean before the Conquest) unless Asser, in his *Exemplar* before mentioned, hath put me much in doubt, *whether he did any thing at all at Oxford towards the advancement of learning.*' To this extreme point of scepticism had the credulous antiquary been reduced by inquiries into old tales.

In his particular way Antony was shrewd enough to know that the famous passage in Camden's '*Asser*' was mere forgery; but after bolstering it up with Brian Twyne's memorandum, which at most only went to prove that the forgery was as ancient as Richard the Second's reign, he left his readers to form their own opinion of the spurious words, whilst

he held himself free to treat them as veritable history whenever it was his humour to do so.

Carping critics might sneer at the Asserian interpolation, but it was altogether satisfactory to ordinary mortals who, for many a day after the dust of Elizabethan controversy had settled on the floor of time, were pleased to assert on its authority that Alfred displayed admirable tact in his endeavours to allay the animosities that in his day inflamed the breasts of the Grymbaldians and older schoolmen, and converted their seat of learning into a field of rancorous warfare. After ceasing to be, in a special and invidious sense, a member of University College, Alfred continued for several generations to hold his ground in popular belief as the originator or most illustrious restorer of the whole university. It was all very fine for modern men, of Hallam's temper and capacity, to pass by the Aluredian claims with disdainful silence; but who was Hallam the new in comparison with Asser the old? What was a modern lawyer when put in the scales against an ancient bishop?

Even so late as some thirty years since, when Professor Huber, after being duly loaded and primed by dignitaries of Oxford and Cambridge, fired off his very entertaining volumes to the glorification of our two foremost national seminaries, the world was authoritatively encouraged to believe in the Alu-

'redian romance. In those volumes — the grand puzzle of which is how the learned German came to know so little about the institutions of which he had learnt so much—the professor, after speaking, to the enthusiastic delight of Oxford gownsmen, with fervent admiration of Alfred, 'the hero, statesman, and sage, warmed by humanity, sanctified by religion, eminently cultivated in intellect, and abounding in genuine patriotism,' went on to declare his respect for the cock-and-bull stories which represent the Saxon king to have been Oxford's founder. The tradition was a reasonable tradition. It might be that there was a grievous absence of 'direct historical proof in its favour,' but still it was 'a tradition which had never been disproved.' It was sustained by the passage in Asser's 'Life of Alfred,' which was credible so far as it concerned Alfred, although it was manifestly absurd in 'explicitly telling of scholastic institutions at Oxford, not only in his day, but as far back as the fifth century.' No doubt the passage was open to objection, but it was not altogether an interpolation. 'My own mature judgment is,' said this astounding professor, '*that the beginning and end are authentic, in which are narrated the contests of the schoolmen and the efforts of Alfred to reconcile them. The intermediate part is very awkwardly interpolated, and (I think) was interpolated in order to pretend the yet greater*

antiquity of these institutions.' I don't like to be uncivil to a foreigner who had the courage to reprove university dons for their insufferable proneness to 'cant' when talking about the morality of undergraduates; but if this accommodating professor, who distinguished so nicely between the genuine and false words of a pedantic forgery, were my own countryman, and had no claim to exceptional courtesy and forbearance, I should not hesitate to suggest that he was guilty of a kind of cant, when, to the gratification of prejudiced supporters whom he was extremely anxious to please, he worked himself into an excitement about the virtues of the Oxonian Alfred, and asked men of letters to regard reverentially certain parts of a contemptible fabrication.

But, notwithstanding their flimsiness, and charlataneries, and undue reliance on Antony Wood, and superabundance of 'unadulterated bosh,' Professor Huber's volumes deserve respect, and will maintain a permanent place amongst the readable literature of authors who have illustrated the story of the English universities. Their worth was over-rated five-and-twenty years since, but they have sterling and enduring value; and of their good results not the least important was the revival of inquiry into the nature of the pseudo-Asser's work, which resulted in a satisfactory verdict that no

single line of the oft-quoted 'Life of Alfred' was the work of his bishop, and that, though the work may perhaps have been written in the tenth century, there are strong grounds for the opinion that it was the performance of a literary concoctor, who did not ply his nefarious pen earlier than the middle of the eleventh century.

With cogency characteristic of his intellect, and courteous modesty no less characteristic of his temper and bearing, Mr. Thomas Wright, of the Society of Antiquaries, and of Trinity College, Cambridge, made it clear that Asser was a pseudo-Asser, that his famous biography was a comparatively recent piece of *litterateur's* patchwork. It followed that the famous passage, about which there had been so much angry dispute, and the spuriousness of which was demonstrated by its contents, was in fact a later falsehood woven into older fiction—a forgery wrought into a forgery—a lie hoping to pass itself off for truth, by pretending to be part of a more ancient lie. By rendering literature this service, Mr. Wright may be said, in language of 'the force,' to have laid his hand firmly on 'the scruff' of King Alfred's neck, and to have expelled him from the university. But to do the royal intruder justice, the officer on duty had no need to use violence. Seeing that his game was up, and that his confederates could no longer sustain his rotten title, the

royal Saxon bowed politely to his adversaries, smiled affectionately on his crest-fallen friends, and, turning upon his heels, went into the country, where he has resided ever since, in the midst of a numerous circle of devoted admirers.

Mr. Wright's exposure of the pseudo-Asser was the conclusion of the long, wearisome, almost profitless contentions about the antiquity of the universities—contentions in which scholars of comparatively recent days occasionally lost self-respect, and scholars of remote time now and then shed their blood. A survey of the dispute affords consolations to each university. Though she has been compelled to give up her claims to Saxon descent, Oxford is allowed to have priority over Cambridge in respect of years. And though Cambridge has failed to establish her preposterous pretensions to antiquity, she has compelled Oxford to admit that they are both the offspring of the same period, and that her Aluredian legends are mythical.

CHAPTER III.

'CHUMS' AND 'INMATES.'

THE new lights on the history of Oxford tell us that the university came into existence between the Norman Conquest and the middle of the twelfth century, and that it had acquired considerable magnitude and importance before the opening of the following age, from which period there is a sufficiency of materials for a clear and reliable narrative of its growth and development. Towards the close of the eleventh century it began to be discernible on the social surface; a hundred years later it was a conspicuous object. In Henry the Third's time it received a royal charter, after it had acquired substance and shape corresponding in many important particulars to our modern notions of a great and powerful university. This vague outline of a narrative the cautious writers fill in with meagre and shadowy details, which stimulate curiosity without gratifying it and leave the student in a condition analogous to the state of things which once upon a

time incited a hungry lad to ask for a second helping of workhouse 'skilly.' A rural cookmaid would give as satisfactory an account of the origin and progress of any mushroom, on which she has put her eye as qualified to help her to an additional pint of catsup. The thing came, increased, grew big. When contrasted against the grandeur of the affair under consideration, the insignificance of the statement is absolutely ludicrous.

In the almost total absence of pertinent evidence to enlighten my ignorance or expose my blunders, I have no intention to imitate the conscientious reticence and timorous moderation of scribes, whose account of the university's earlier years is little more than a confession of their uncertainty about them. On the contrary, I have much pleasure in stating precisely how the original schools of Oxford were planted, how they took root, and how they grew into the imposing, and august, and complicated affair which, in compliance with an antiquated and highly absurd fashion, Oxonians are wont to call their Alma Mater.

Some five-and-twenty years had passed since the French robbers had settled themselves into the desirable English quarters, which plunder had bestowed upon them, when towards the last year of the eleventh century there might have been seen, wending their tardy way towards the walls of Ox-

ford, a party consisting of seven pedestrians, whose rusty habiliments and thoughtful countenances betokened their possession of learning and their want of money. Each of the wayfarers bore, slung from his neck, a wallet, of which the chief contents were a slenderly provided purse and the materials for a frugal meal. Each traveller also carried upon his shoulders an unobtrusive knapsack that contained a few manuscripts, and such articles as may be conveniently designated his household gods, but neither a clean shirt nor a change of outer raiment. Of various ages, between twenty-five and fifty years, these men had endured troubles and cherished divers ambitions : but of their private experiences and aims, it suffices for the purpose of this page to say that they were uncertificated members of the scholastic profession--a calling more honourable than honoured, when might was right, and noblemen thought it rather discreditable to be able to write their names legibly,—and that they were journeying to Oxford in the reasonable hope that they would be able to earn their livelihood by imparting their knowledge to the children of its burghers ; in other words, to use language more befitting a lofty theme, by teaching the young idea how to shoot.

I am in a position to state the exact considerations which decided these dealers in learning to select Oxford as the scene of their future labours :

but as it would not answer my purpose to render the public altogether as knowing as myself, I shall not reveal the auspicious motives, until some critic has demonstrated to my satisfaction that the adventurers would have done better for themselves and society at large had they settled in Stoke Pogis, Mudfog-in-the-West, or Blathering-by-the-Sea.

Towards the close of a laborious day the seven comrades discerned the keep and modest tenements of the city, and ere the light had gradually faded into darkness they had found shelter appropriate to their lowly condition, and as occupants of the same bed were unconsciously recruiting their energies for the anxious duties of the morrow. If the reader may not enjoy the belief that sleep afforded them provisions of all that Dr. Arnold would do some seven centuries later for their despised vocation, he may at least find comfort in the assurance that their repose was disturbed by no apprehensions of professional failure.

It might be imagined that these founders of Oxford University, before announcing their readiness to instruct pupils, built or hired houses in which to receive their little friends; but they did no such thing. To employ masons and purchase ground was beyond the means of men who did not even deem themselves justified in becoming the tenants of a single important edifice. It was a time for small

beginnings ; and the settlers were glad to obtain the use of some unfurnished chambers and ramshackle outhouses, from householders whose notions of rent were the reverse of exorbitant. One of the adventurers acquired for a few pence, paid half-yearly, a spacious and cobwebby garret at the top of a cordwainer's dwelling ; another was so fortunate as to secure a room over a beer-shop ; a third, the most successful of the party, contrived to get possession of a disused stable, a loft, an old hen-house, and a small court containing a large water-butt, on the understanding that he would teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, to his landlord's three sons.

Having acted on reliable information, the seven teachers were not long without an adequate number of scholars. The traders of the town had for a considerable time been in want of competent instructors for their sons, and were not slow in giving a trial to the new-comers, who no less speedily justified the confidence of their employers and conciliated the social opinion of the town. Every successive three months saw an enlargement in their classes, which soon comprised youngsters who came daily into Oxford for teaching from homesteads beyond the walls. And as the success of the Oxford pedagogues was rumoured about the country, other scholastic bread-seekers appeared in the city ; so that, before a generation had passed away, the academic profession

had become an important feature of the permanent population of the place.

And here let one pause to impress on readers the importance of the service which the last few paragraphs have rendered to historical literature. Already has this chapter shown what no previous work has dared to demonstrate. When the seven primitive settlers had hired their first quarters, the university was planted; when the townspeople sent children to their classes, the university had taken root; so soon as fresh teachers, following in the wake of the pioneers, opened fresh schools, the university was on the road to fame. After all, it is no such difficult matter to write history in the absence of facts; and when I reflect on the ease with which I am throwing off this lustrous narrative of scholastic doings in the dark ages, I marvel how timid chroniclers of the same matters have been deprived of nerve by the very circumstances which should have inspired them with serviceable audacity.

When the Oxford teachers had flourished for a few years as the teachers of day-schools, the more energetic and speculative of them tried their fortune in the lodging-house line of their ignoble profession, and began to offer their young friends the advantages of a comfortable home, together with the benefits of sound instruction. Just as the old law-schools of London, that preceded the establishment

of the Inns of Court and Inns of Chancery on the outskirts of the City, were called Inns of Law or Hostels for Law Students, these Oxford boarding-schools were designated hotels or inns by the unlearned vulgar, as well as by the scholars themselves, who, however, soon contracted a pedantic fashion of calling them *Aulæ*, or *Scholars' Hallæ*. These ancient colleges had no foundations, no real or personal property yielding snug incomes to principals and tutors, whether they lived in industry or idlene. Each of them was the private and commercial speculation of the chief master or principal, who hired and furnished the building, provided bedding and food for its 'innates,' and paid salaries to such subordinate masters as he required to assist him in offices of instruction. If the master failed to draw scholars, his creditors compelled him to shut up shop. If after achieving success in scholastic industry he failed, through loss of mental competence or growing indolence, to sustain the reputation and popularity of his establishment, younger and more vigorous competition soon cut the ground from under his feet, and rendered his inn a losing concern.

The first of these inns had not been established many years, when there were about a score of such seminaries in the full swing of business within a mile and a half of St. Mary's Church; and when the boarding-schools had thus increased and multiplied,

the Oxonian seminaries and scholars were divisible into two main classes,—boarding-schools and their pupils; day-schools and their learners. It does not appear that for some time the one class claimed any superiority over the other. The boarding-schools were mainly supported by parents living at a distance from Oxford, who preferred to send their children to places where they would be taken in and done for, rather than throw them into a large and growing town, in a condition of comparatively masterless freedom. But though the inns relied chiefly on comers from the provinces, they did not disdain to receive day-boarders at their classes. On the other hand, though the day-schools were the special seminaries for children who had parents or friends living in Oxford, their classes were attended by students who had come to them from remote parts of the kingdom, and who, though subject to the ferula and birch in school-hours, slept in their own lodgings and ‘found for themselves’ in every thing except instruction.

In course of time, however, the boarding-schools surpassed the private day-schools in number and influence; and from circumstances,—which, I suspect, were consistently misrepresented by persons interested in the suppression of the day-schools and the exaltation of the boarding-schools,—it came to pass that the students, who omitted to join one of

the numerous inns, became objects of dislike and contempt to their academic superiors. For generations it had been the fashion for these innless students to 'chum' together in parties. Sometimes so few as three or four, sometimes so many as a dozen, of them would be sharers of the single 'camera,' i.e., chamber, whence they derived their appellation of 'chums.' That these poor lads were in many cases idle and dissolute,—that they were more or less given to drunkenness and turbulence, I do not doubt, since Oxonians of all kinds in the feudal days were disorderly and quarrelsome fellows, and were prone to run after liquor whenever they had money in their pockets. But in the agitation which exhibited the chamber-students,—the 'camera degentes' of the statutes, the 'chamber-dekyns' of ordinary parlance,—to the detestation of the aularians, or 'inmates,' I detect the action of the schoolmasters who, deriving fresh profit from every new development of the boarding-school system, were bent on suppressing the private day-schools, and on compelling every student to render tribute to some keeper of a hall; and who, jealous of the townspeople, could not endure that they should participate in the lucrative business of providing scholars with lodging and food. Anyhow, in the course of years, a spirit of mutual enmity arose between the dwellers in halls and the dwellers

in lodgings. To be an 'inmate' was honourable; to be a 'chum' or 'chamber-dekyn' was abominable. The struggle between the 'inmates' and 'chums,'—the mates of inns and the sharers of chambers,—was fruitful of numerous broils in the streets, and of some important additions to the statutes of the university, and eventually resulted in a revolution which gave the keepers of boarding-schools and their confederates nearly everything for which they had contended, by endowing them with an almost complete monopoly of learning within the limits of the university. It is worthy of remark, that during the struggle between the aularian scholars and the chamber-dekyns, the term 'inmates' acquired a significance almost identical with 'schoolmate;' a meaning which it has, perhaps, not even yet altogether lost. Also, it should be remembered, that after a lapse of several generations, the term 'chamber-mate' or 'chum' lost its opprobrious force, so that in Elizabethan university life, undergraduates, sharing the same chamber, were wont to call one another familiarly 'chums.'

Whenever a riot occurred at Oxford, the blame of it was assigned chiefly to the chamber-students in the days when the masters combined to put down the lodginghouse system. To render them peculiarly odious, and secure their extinction, it was represented that the chamber-dekyns were fierce and

murderous Irishmen, who congregated in Oxford for bloodshed and rapine, instead of for learning and good manners. Hence, a fashion arose of speaking of chamber-dekyns as Irish and ferocious foreigners. Henry the Fifth was reigning when academic life was disturbed by events concerning which our scarcely impartial old friend, Antonius à Bosco, remarks, 'As the University, therefore, was troubled at this time, and before, with heretics (as they were now called), so was it now with a sort of scholars called chamber-dekyns, no other, as it seems than Irish beggars, who, in the habit of poor scholars, would often disturb the peace of the University, live under no government of principals, keep up for the most part in the day, and in the night-time go abroad to commit spoils and manslaughter; lurk about in taverns and houses of ill report; commit burglaries, and such like. All which being generally noted, and complaints made to the king of the said misdemeanours, a statute was made by the parliament, which speaketh that "forasmuch as divers offences had been committed by the Irish scholars in Oxford, all Irish people should depart the realm, except some that were religious, and others that were graduates, upon condition of putting in security for their good behaviour, and that they take not upon them the principality of any hall or hostile, but rather be under the principality of others, and

that no Irish should presume to come to either of the universities, unless he show the chancellor of either, testimonial letters from the Lieutenant or Justice of Ireland of his good behaviour. If otherwise, he was to be punished as a rebel to the king." "For all which Antony's authority is the brief edict of 1 Henry V., which has been translated from its original French : 'Item, for the quietness and peace within the realme of England, and for encreas and restorynge of the land of Irland, it is ordeyned and stablyshed in this present Parlyament that all Iryshmen and Irysh clerkes beggars, called chamberdeckens, be voyded out of the realm.'

But it was easier to make laws than to enforce them in the fifteenth century; and nine years after the publication of Henry the Fifth's parliamentary edict against the Irishry of Oxford, the battle between the 'chums' and 'inmates' was still raging fiercely, when the chancellor and masters of the university ordered, by a special statute, the expulsion of the chamberdeckens—i. e. all those students *in statu pupillari* who were too poor to pay for board and lodging in the house of one of the licensed schoolmasters. 'About the same time, also, the university made a statute against such (says Antony Wood, under date 1422) who in the form of scholars lurk in divers places within the University, who were neither of any hall or under the

government of a principal, called, by the wicked name of Chamberdekany, by whom the peace of the University being disturbed, as 'tis mentioned in 1413; the University, therefore, for the better finding them out, to the end that they might be banished, ordered that all members that took commons in any college or hall should lodge within them, under pain of imprisonment for the first time of offending, &c. So that since this time I think Oxford, styled by Balæus "Gymnasium Hibernorum," hath little been frequented by Irishmen, because chiefly they were excluded the principality of halls or inns, or government or tutelage in the University.'

There was a strange difference between the chamberdekyn of fact and the chamberdekyn of a strongly prejudiced inmate's imagination. To his adversaries the poor fellow was a species of academic Fenian, nursing diabolical passions beneath a repulsive exterior, and waiting for an opportunity to wreak his spite against learning on the lives and property of learned men. A creature of sallow visage and wolfish eyes, of shaggy locks and tattered clothes, marvellously patient of hunger in the absence of food, but disgustingly voracious of meat whenever it fell in his way, a drunkard by taste and a thief by necessity, he was equally alert to cut purses and throats, and cherished no sweeter

ambition than to rifle the benefactors' chests in the treasury of St. Mary's Church. Charity and common sense, however, countenance a suspicion that the poor fellow's worst offence against his superiors was want of money, that his gravest sins against society resulted from the badness of his drink rather than from the evil of his nature, and that his great crime against himself was recklessness begotten of misery and a keen sense of injustice. No doubt there was a basis of truth in some of the lighter charges preferred against him ; and it may be that the welfare of the university required the suppression of his class ; but his denouncers rouse sympathy for him by their violence, and demonstrate their malignity by extravagant assertions. A man is not necessarily an Irishman because he lives in lodgings ; nor is poverty a conclusive proof that its victim is a Celtic conspirator.

When they had brought about the enactment of the university statute against the chamberdekyns, the principals of inns and their supporters had attained their chief desire, and congratulated themselves enthusiastically on the speedy extirpation of the unprofitable students. Nor to men taking their view of the question was the victory an affair for ordinary thankfulness. Though its provisions were repeatedly disregarded in later times, and it was not at any time so rigidly enforced

as the more intolerant inn-keepers wished it to be, the statute was an enduring declaration on the part of the university authorities in favour of the scholastic houses, and of the system of academic government which required every student to be a registered member of, and habitual resident within, a master's hall. That the decision was a genuine expression of university opinion, and that it accorded with the sentiments of the majority of persons interested in the welfare of the schools, there is no room for doubt. It was also agreeable to the prevalent views of the period that saw the rapid progress of the collegiate movement which had begun some hundred and fifty years earlier.

There are some, no doubt, who will resent the suggestion that the action of the principals and teachers against the 'chums' was the result of that tendency towards a protective policy which characterised all the numerous commercial and industrial associations of the feudal epoch. Liking cheerful views, I anticipate some rough handling on this point; but, though I am not over-nice or squeamish about offending people in the way of duty, I would provide against misrepresentation by expressly acquitting the Oxonian principals of being actuated by selfish greed, that was neither qualified nor palliated by sincere belief that the abolition of the university lodger franchise and of the day-school system would

conduce no less to the good of the entire scholastic community than to the private interests of the keepers of halls. For the most part they were fairly honest and conscientious men; but, like the great majority of human kind, they were more than ordinarily zealous for public benefit when its attainment would result in special advantage to themselves.

And now the reader must right-about-face, and, leaving the chamberdekyns of the fifteenth, return to the schoolmasters of the twelfth, century.

The Oxford schoolmasters of the earlier half of the twelfth century were a strange and heterogeneous lot of fellows,—teachers who had failed to get pupils in other towns; scape-graces turned out of the monasteries for indiscretions not permissible in such inferior and ministering persons as the assistant pedagogues of the choristers and other lads educated in the conventual seminaries; Saxon outlaws who, finding the life of patriotic foresters less agreeable in practice than imagination, had escaped from their companions of the woods in search of the more secure though less romantic experience of scholastic employment; peccant curates and other ecclesiastical delinquents, who had fled from their proper districts just soon enough to escape episcopal punishment; clerks whose patrons had kicked them out of castles or manorial halls for lampooning their mistresses, sneering at their betters, or falsifying accounts.

Soberer and sounder men were the associates of these less reputable adventurers ; but when the most favourable view is taken of the originators of the Oxonian Alma Mater, it cannot be doubted that their ranks comprised a dangerous proportion of scholastic Adullamites and literary rascals.

Fortunately, however, for themselves and posterity, these 'odd fellows' did the right thing in settling at Oxford. Their schools thrived, and arrived at lucrative celebrity all the sooner, because they were not required to undermine any older academies in social esteem before they could obtain from the world a due consideration of their own merits. Hence the aggregation of schoolmasters grew with a rapidity which is very astonishing, when the smallness and sparseness of the population are taken under observation ; and not less quickly than the supply of teachers, grew the number of applicants for instruction, who found their ways to the town of many schools in pedestrian or mounted companies, that usually journeyed from distant parishes under the guidance and control of persons authorised by the Oxford teachers to conduct young scholars to the temple of knowledge.

So soon as their success was considerable and promised to be permanent, the Oxonian teachers formed themselves into a co-operative association for the protection of their interests against rivals in

business, and against the exacting temper of their employers. In the twelfth century, and every age of the feudal epoch, such a conspiracy arose, as a matter of course, whenever a new industry acquired sufficient importance to bring together a large number of workers. The first occupiers of an industrial field, that bade fair to be lucrative, voted themselves into a trades-union, which arrogated to itself the exclusive right of deciding, within a certain district, in what manner and for what considerations apprentices should be trained to their craft, at what rates their skilful labour should be bought and sold, and on what terms adventurers should be received within the limits of the confederates' assumed jurisdiction. 'Guild' was the familiar term for such a combination of workers.

Of course the members of every guild made pleasant professions of fraternal love for the freemen of their brotherhood, and consistently maintained that their union was framed altogether for the general good of society, and for no selfish object. But for their guild, urged the incorporated Leathern Breeches Makers of Blathering-by-the-Sea, and other like associations for protecting the public interests in leather leggings, the country would endure grievous ills. Raw and incompetent needlemen, who had never been properly trained in youth, would be palming themselves off upon the public as reliable fabricators

of man's most important habiliments. Cordwainers and subsidiary tanners, no longer restrained from vicious practices by the salutary influence of the Breeches-Guilds, would flood the country with rotten leather, that would speedily succumb to strain and friction. Honest citizens would be defrauded of their money by rogues dealing in artificial integuments of a specious but altogether delusive appearance; and ere three generations had passed away, old England would have lost for ever the mystery and art of making sound nether-garments, a mystery and art which, like all the other subtle elements of national greatness, when once destroyed, could never be supplied. It was thus that the case of co-operation was put by thriving guildsmen, whose representations, I regret to say, instead of finding universal favour, were insolently derided by caustic, ill-conditioned, bitter fellows—just such men as the Oxonian teachers, in days prior to their success—who, having no material investments or monopolies of their own to teach them common sense, cherished a hateful and morbid theory that a guild was a club which, whilst covering its purely selfish designs with fair pretences, aimed at the enrichment of its own members at the expense of the rest of the community.

Following the example of all other successful workers, the Oxford schoolmasters formed them-

selves into a guild, but instead of applying this unimpressive and too familiar title to their corporation, they preferred to style their guild a 'universitas'—a word which well became a combination of dealers in learning, whose chief article of trade was a rude Latin, and which aptly expressed the oneness of their corporate existence—the condition of unity into which the interests of numerous individuals had been brought.

Jealous of the new teachers who were steadily journeying to Oxford, allured by rumours of the scholastic activity of the place, and actuated by motives easily imagined by any usher who has broken into his last sovereign, the 'universitas' raised a double barrier against the intruders, by laying down rules for their admission within the scholastic fraternity, and fixing the remunerations of scholastic labour. No teacher should be free of the guild until he had performed certain exercises exhausting to the pocket of the exerciser, undergone certain courses of instruction beneficial to the instructors, and paid certain fees to the guild which he desired to enter. For the pupils attending the various schools, 'universitas' laid down rules analogous to the regulations of industrial guilds for the government of apprentices. 'Universitas' ordained that boys should receive preliminary instruction in the private grammar-schools before entering the higher

lecture-rooms; that each scholar, after emerging from his preparatory school, should attend certain lectures, and take part in certain disputations, before he could assume the sophistic name and hood; and that he should perform other tasks and figure in other ceremonies before he could ask the chancellor or his deputy to grant him permission to discharge the august functions of a full-blown B.A. And so on, from the humbler to the highest of the distinctions which 'Universitas' offered to the world's wonder and to the ambition of the learned, conditions of service and pecuniary payment were fixed for the attainment of each honour. No one can deny that 'Universitas' made the most of her opportunities, and was a very shrewd lady of business. Within Oxford and its vicinity, no master was allowed to keep a school who neglected to pay his proper dues to the guild; and as the repute of being an Oxford scholar grew more and more saleable, 'Universitas' devised various new kinds of academic honour, and distributed more or less of them on her alumni, in proportion as they heightened her prosperity by residing in her schools or bringing grist to her mill.

Although I know nearly everything about Oxford in the dark ages, I regret to acknowledge that it is not in my power to state the exact year in which the academic guild was formed; but since Robertus

Canutus was the officially recorded 'Rector Scholarum' so early as 1122, it is clear that the association was in existence in the days of Henry the First, and that the schoolmasters had not long been at Oxford before they created a brotherhood for the good of their profession and the advantage of the public. Some hundred years had still to elapse before 'Universitas' obtained royal recognition in the shape of her charter; but as the actual ruler of the Oxford teachers, and the controller of their actions when they had left the seat of learning, she was in existence in the earlier part of the twelfth century.

So long as 'Universitas' was nothing more than a voluntary association of schoolmasters, having the authority of no royal charter, and possessing no power to enforce their edicts by lawful means, it lay within the province of any daring intruder to beard the Rector Scholarum, and act upon his natural right to render himself useful to his fellow-creatures by opening a school without the Guild's sanction. But he would have been a rash and misguided man, who had dared to defy the scholastic chief. Right or no right, 'Universitas' would have gained an easy, though probably not a bloodless, triumph over such an offender. The Oxonian of old time, as we shall soon see, was even more liberal of blows than words in moments of anger, and had an ugly way of sustaining

his arguments—with fists sent out straight from the shoulder, a cudgel brought down murderously on his opponent's head, or, in cases of extreme urgency, a knife sent well home under his enemy's fifth rib. Terribly loyal to 'Universitas,' this scholastic union-man, without a single twinge of conscience, would have made short work with any interloper who transgressed the rules of trade; and, after bruining and kicking him into the Cherwell, would have returned to his inn, secure of his principal's approval. 'Rattening' is an art cultivated wherever men congregate, and it was an art of which the mediæval Oxonian was a vigorous, though inelegant, practitioner.

CHAPTER IV.

CLAUSTRAL SCHOOLS AND BENEFACTIONS.

HITHERTO notice has been taken only of the secular schools, *i.e.*, schools under the government of laymen, or of priests belonging to the secular species. Nor is there any need to devote much time and thought to the 'claustral schools,' which the monks and friars built within the lines of the university, and supplied with teachers: for whilst, on the one hand, the claustral schools closely resembled the secular schools in all social and pictorial respects, it is, on the other hand, certain that the academies of the regular clergy, notwithstanding the disturbances occasioned by the Oxonian monks and friars in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, made no greatly important contribution to the life of the university that survived the abolition of the regular orders.

There is, indeed, an antiquarian's argument—based on inferences drawn from old boots and college gowns—which asks us to believe that, because the Oxonian Masters of ancient days wore boots or high-

lows (before their adoption of academic pantofles or slippers), similar to the boots of the Benedictine monks, and dark gowns, resembling the vestes of those same swarthy 'regulars,' it follows that the Benedictines had a preponderating influence in the affairs of the university. The force of this suggestion is not increased by the simplicity with which its originator affirms that the Black Monks frequented the university in King Alfred's days and assisted that monarch in works of literary restoration. Even if it is granted that scholars copied their dress in some particulars from the monks, the inference is not justifiable. We don't necessarily admit to our closest confidence the man whose taste in dress commands our approval.

A far stronger and more plausible argument, in favour of this theory of monastic influence on the university, might be drawn from the fact that the scholastic monks originated the fashion for students to call their teachers 'dons' or 'lords'—a fashion jocularly observed to this day by undergraduates. Whilst the secular priests were called 'sirs,' when not described by their academic degrees, the monks, constituting a higher degree of clergy, were termed 'domini,' 'dons,' 'lords.' Illustrations of this colloquial mode of distinguishing between the aristocratic and plebeian sections of the national priesthood may be found in Chaucer and other writers of the

fourteenth century. And it is worthy of passing remark, that in the case of the famous lecturer, Don Scotus, the title was so corrupted, that the professor was universally termed Duns Scotus,—whence came the opprobrious word ‘dunce.’ From which it appears that ‘don, a wise lord,’ and ‘dunce, a fool,’ are variations of the same title. But in accounting for the early adoption of the monastic title by the Oxonians, the reader is under no need to think that it resulted from any direct influence of the regular clergy on the affairs of the university. For centuries monks had been the chief teachers, and monastic schools the principal seminaries of English boys, who of course were trained to call their instructors ‘lords.’ Hence the schoolboys of the entire country derived from the monastic schools an universal fashion of ‘my lording’ their pedagogues,—a fashion which they were never instructed to lay aside on becoming Oxonians. Probably enough they attributed not much more of ennobling significance to the familiar term, than school-children of recent date gave to the almost obsolete title ‘dominie.’

The regular clergy were amongst the many persons who congratulated the Oxonian schoolmasters very cordially on their success when it became desirable to participate in it; and they proved the sincerity of their polite speeches by doing their best to share in, and gain credit for, a triumph

which had been achieved without their assistance. But, notwithstanding their exertions and the proximity of Oseney Abbey, the monks of the older sorts never flourished greatly within the jurisdiction of the learned corporation. They founded schools, which were for a time well attended, and were never without frequenters; and they gave rise to several sanguinary riots in the vicinity of St. Mary's; but the Oxonians were for the most part decidedly antagonistic to the regulars, who had better have spared themselves the pains which they took to conquer the university.

Nor were the new monks—the brothers of the Mendicant Orders—much more successful in their boisterous attempts to render themselves the chief teachers and dominant power of the guild. On their first arrival in England they settled in Oxford; and, emboldened by the success of the begging-priests in foreign universities, they conceived an ambition to control the schools and students of the English seminary. In this hope they were signally defeated, in spite of the boldness, and zeal, and unscrupulous subtlety with which they strove to effect their purpose. For a brief while—until their insolence and encroachments had revealed the nature of their professions of lowliness, and roused the jealous antagonism of the Oxonian scholars and laity—they seemed in a fair way to achieve their aim; but in

the end they were compelled to yield to the forces which they had irritated by alternate flatteries and menaces. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the friars kept the scholars in a continual ferment, and besides occasioning a series of violent disputes gave rise to several sanguinary riots. But their policy effected nothing that compensated them for the ill-will which it drew upon their entire class. The influence of their great adversary, Wycliffe, with the seculars of the University was largely due to the firmness and uncompromised vehemence with which he opposed the Mendicants, whose unscrupulous machinations to draw students to their schools and inns were repaid by the satires which held them up to general odium as 'stealers of children.'

Originating in the first instance from the exertions of laymen and secular priests, and owing none of their success to the monastic organisations which have been erroneously credited with their production, the Oxford schools retained their first distinctive characteristics in spite of the endeavours of rival 'orders' to make them mere appendages to monasticism. The guild, which they had united to create, received the teachers of monastic orders with proper liberality, but the aggregation of schools remained the principal seat of learning for laymen and secular clergy. Whilst the monks and friars

educated in the various colleges of their several orders merely regarded Oxford as a social power on which they would do well to lay hands as an engine for influencing the humbler people, the lay-students and secular ecclesiastics looked to the Universitas with jealous pride as a ~~seminary~~ called into being for their special benefit by men belonging to the one or the other of their own social kinds. The Reformation found the place frequented by laymen, to whom a considerable proportion had joined the University without any intention of taking sacred orders, and found it also the chief school for the secular clergy; that is to say (for it is needless to obscure simple things with grand words), the school where rude lads bent on becoming parish-priests acquired the smattering of Latin, and Logic, and Bible, which constituted the ordinary knowledge of a parish-priest in the earlier half of the sixteenth century.

Less embarrassing and more beneficial than the perilous co-operation of the regular clergy were the attentions which the Oxford schoolmasters received from the opulent and noble persons who, like the patron of Samuel Johnson's experience, had watched with unconcern the danger of 'Universitas,' whilst she was struggling for life, but were ready enough to help when she had reached ground and could shift for herself. So long as the guild of school-

masters was in urgent need of founders and benefactors it found few wealthy supporters, and not a single protector in the rank of princes. But so soon as the teachers had made themselves a power in the land—‘a connexion’ that it was agreeable to know and prudent to conciliate—in accordance with the first instincts of princely nature, the magnates of earth came to their support.

The thirteenth was the century in which ‘Universitas’ received her first important benefactions; the ‘chests’ which yielded relief to poor scholars, and the munificent foundations of William of Durham, John Balliol, and Walter of Merton. It was also the century in which she first obtained the protection of royalty, certified by charter—some six centuries from the present time, and something less than two hundred years after the first plantation of her earliest schools; about a century before the establishment of legal colleges in the vicinity of London, and some two hundred years before ‘the chums’ were driven from Oxford by ‘the inmates.’

CHAPTER V.

* SCHOOLS AND SCHOLARS.

IN the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the university was seen in full work, with its two orders of schools—the preparatory grammar-schools, in which children acquired the first elements of learning; and the higher schools, in which older students, varying from eleven years of age to early manhood, attended lectures, said lessons, held disputations, and performed the various exercises preliminary to attainment of degrees. Just as the inns of the London lawyers—institutions, by the way, that copied the method and arrangements of the university---comprised preparatory schools (in the houses of Chancery) for pupils of tender years and beginners in legal study, as well as higher schools for the instruction of older and more advanced learners, there flourished within the university establishments for the training of quite little boys and class-rooms for big boys and young men.

The older pupils performed most of their exercises

under cover ; but they also took part in disputations that were carried on in the open air, in the precincts of St. Mary's Church and the central schools, just as the students of Lincoln's Inn argued points of law in the cloisters under their chapel, and the youngsters of either Temple wrangled in the *pervise* or precinct of their hall. The exercises thus performed by 'general sophisters,' in the presence of bachelors, in the *pervise* (or 'parvis') of the schools, were said to be performed 'in parvis,' or 'in parvisiis,' whence in recent times the first examinations of undergraduates came to be called 'smalls' and 'little go.'

Notwithstanding the adverse influence of civil commotions, which more than once in the middle ages led to the comparative desertion of the schools and temporary cessation of their studies ; and notwithstanding outbursts of pestilence—an enemy which the Oxonian teachers of old time dreaded as much as the modern schoolmaster dreads an outbreak of scarlatina in his academy—the university made rapid advances to the state in which men of the last century found her. The day of benefactions having arrived, old Oxonians more and more frequently gave, by living hand or last testament, sums of money to the academic guild, for the benefit of poor students in particular inns, or for the relief of the general body of indigent students. Schoolmasters also, on retiring from life or business, in cases where

they owned the inns of which they were principals, sometimes made them over to the corporation, whose interest it would be to preserve them as seminaries for children. Hence some few of the inns acquired permanent endowments, of which their mates participated under the guardianship of the university. And whilst the more fortunate inns thus grew in power and the elements of durability, acquiring the material prosperity which has enabled them to survive to the present day under the title of halls, there arose new colleges—hotels that differed from other permanently endowed inns in being separate corporations, invested with powers of self-government and the right to possess and manage their own estates.

The reader, however, must continue to think of the university of this period as an aggregation of schoolmasters, some of whom kept preparatory boarding-schools for young children, whilst others were principals of the superior inns in which the pupils of the higher grades resided, and not a few, content with the mere profits of teaching, and having no appetite for the fluctuating gains of an inn-keeper, earned their livelihood by instructing classes of the elder scholars, who were subject to them only whilst in actual attendance at their lectures.

Even the omniscient scribe of these pages hesitates to declare the precise number of the schools open at any one time of this period within the jurisdiction of

the Rector Scholarum, or, as he has now come to be called, Chancellor of the University. But they must have been numerous, though less so than Antonius à Bosco would have us believe. Besides the grammar-schools in the preparatory inns for children, there were the schools in the inns for adult pupils; the schools in which Latin-masters, logic-teachers, arithmeticians, professors of music, and proficient in other largely-taught arts, were visited daily by their classes; the principal school-rooms of the three faculties, Law, Divinity, and Physic; and the scores of chambers in which, during full term, the artists performed their exercises for B.A. and M.A. degrees. An artist often experienced great difficulty in hiring a room, in which to go through his academic paces before the requisite number of qualified witnesses; and in his inability to secure a chamber near St. Mary's Church, the centre of scholastic activity, he was thankful for permission to achieve his intellectual feats in a room over a victualler's shop in one of the back streets.

It may not be supposed that the best schools were such buildings as the New Schools, still in existence; and the mistake would be yet greater to imagine that they had any of the architectural merits of the Divinity School, which was built towards the end of the fifteenth century. Before the Abbot of Oseney erected his ten schools in School Street, some forty years before the completion of the Divinity

School, the Oxford students had not a university class-room of larger dimensions or finer architecture than what would now-a-days be thought a discreditable mean school-house for a country village. By that time Oxford had some eight or nine colleges, provided with halls of considerable magnitude and comparatively noble rooms; but the buildings of the university, with the signal exception of St. Mary's, were greatly beneath her social importance. In short, the schools were paltry little closets, meanly built and cheaply furnished, in the fashion of the modern village dominie's place of business.

More than thirty of these class-rooms were to be found in School Street, the thoroughfare which, in times prior to the erection of the new schools, extended from St. Mary's Church up to the northern boundary of the city, and which was so peculiarly devoted to learning, that artists performing public exercises for degrees were for a time not allowed to accomplish them elsewhere if School Street had accommodation for them. For the most part, these class-rooms, like the inns to which several of them were attached, bore the names of teachers who had first brought them into vogue by their learning, or eloquence, or some such personal peculiarities as a large nose or a bald head. Their doors, also, were in many cases distinguished by inscriptions, proclaiming the particular kinds of learning obtainable

within; and, now and then, a dealer in knowledge, to distinguish his shop from rival stalls in the same neighbourhood, would hang out an ordinary shop-sign. Antony Wood, a capital authority for such details, speaks of 'divers schools and halls having been distinguished by certain signs over their doors, or on the walls within them.' Thus Ox School, in School Street, is mentioned by the antiquarian as the house '*ubi bos depingebatur*,'—a sign which also distinguished Beef Hall, in the parish of St. Ebbe's, from all other boarding-houses of its kind. Brasenose College, occupying ground which was the very centre of the scholastic activity of Oxford, derives its name from a hall which it absorbed, and which was rendered conspicuous in old time to all who sought its gate by the the sign of a Brazen Nose.

The Oxonian of the present day, who resents being told that the splendid university, of which he is no unworthy member, had its origin in a combination of pedagogues who 'keepeed schules and cau'd them acaademies,' is not likely to be pacified by aught that I can tell him of the style, social status, and general condition of his academic precursors in times before the Reformation. Indeed, this cup of new thought and old story will prove no pleasant compound to any representative of young Oxford who takes so erroneous a

view of the antecedents of his seminary, and cherishes so false a conception of its historic dignity, as to admire it for having been the peculiar nursery of aristocratic or comparatively affluent youth in feudal days, or to rest its claims to respect on the fancied politeness and gentility of its earlier generations of students.

Notwithstanding the fervour and genuine enthusiasm with which he descants on the loveliness of her venerable aspect, and the vigour of her glorious oldness, there is reason to suspect that such an undergraduate would fail to discern much poetic grace or sweetness in his idolized Alma Mater, if she were put before him under the precise circumstances of her saucy girlhood or first womanly years. If he could journey backwards some six and more centuries into the past, and take a peep at his benignant mother, labouring under adverse circumstances, holding no regular and unbroken intercourse with the nobles of the land, possessing scarcely the germ of those material resources which contribute so largely to her present influence, owning scarce a stone of the architectural creations to which she has for many a day been so largely indebted for her external attractiveness, and doing rough work in rude times by homely means,—he would be less disposed to fall upon his knee and sue for her blessing or for leave

to kiss her hand, than to repudiate his relationship with so boisterous and unrefined a progenitor.

For, to clothe truth in an Irishism, *Alma Mater's* girlhood was an affair of the middle age, and, whilst enjoying a full share of mediæval robustness, it was not devoid of the harsher and more repulsive qualities of mediævalism. On attaining maturity she was no creature of delicate outlines and patrician mien, no stately muse with thoughtful eyes, no queen of fashion enthroned amongst courtiers ; but a stoutly-built, energetic woman, with broad shoulders and a thick neck, clad in homespun, ominously muscular about the arms, and well pleased to govern her prodigious family of riotous boys on principles that had come to her from that grandest and oldest of all academic mothers, the ancient lady who lived in a shoe, and periodically asserted her maternal authority by subjecting a numerous progeny to stripes and meagre diet.

Under ordinary circumstances, when famine had the good taste to keep away from the land, the Oxford scholars—alike the little boys in the grammar-halls, and the older inmates who were up to all kinds of sophistical absurdities—had sufficient rations of wholesome food. In every academic generation, the roll of licensed halls doubtless comprised some establishments of the true Dotheboys

type,—places where young children were taken in and done for in a fashion that raised domestic parsimony to the rank of a fine art, and enriched the Squeerses of feudal society at the expense of their young friends from distant provinces. But such houses were few; and so long as meat and malt liquor, oatmeal and coarse flour, were plentiful in the High Street on market days, I doubt not that the tables of the boarding-schools yielded a sufficiency of nutriment to the lads who fed at them. It often happened, however, that supplies were deficient and prices correspondingly high; whereupon riots sometimes arose at the seat of learning—conflicts between the provision-dealers of the city and the knowledge-seekers of the schools, in which the latter fought with a terrible vindictiveness, equally significant of their ignorance of political economy and their familiar acquaintance with pangs of hunger. Nor in seasons of abundance was the ordinary fare of an Oxonian commendable for aught but sufficiency and wholesomeness.

The gruel of the inns was thick, and made of milk as well as water, but careless cooking too often gave it the burnt flavour which roused the discontent and disgust of its consumers. The loaves of wheaten or pulse bread were sometimes so dark throughout, that it was not always easy to say at a glance whether the crust had been charred in the

oven. The meat served up in joints, or stews, or puddings, was the meat of the period,—cut from beasts produced and raised the Lord knows where and how, and in the winter months so salt that it skinned the eater's gums; it had a toughness for the parallel of which the nineteenth-century Englishman must bring his teeth in contact with the bovine tissue of the prairie herds of South America. Of such beef a pennyworth was apportioned to each mess of those poor Cantabrigians, of whose labours and privations Thomas Lever spoke with quaintly expressed pathos from the Paul's Cross pulpit, in the middle of the sixteenth century, when he said, 'There be divers there, which ryse daylye betwyxte four and fyve of the clocke in the mornynge, and from fyve untill syxe of the clocke, use common prayer wyth an exhortacyon of God's worde in a common chappell, and from syxe unto ten of the clocke use ever eyther pryvate study or commune lectures. At ten of the clocke they go to dynner, whereas they be contente wyth a peny pece of byefe amongst iiij, hauinge a fewe porage made of the brothe of the same byefe, wyth salt and otemell and nothyng els. After this slender dinner they be either teachynge or learnynge untill v of the clocke in the eveninge, when as they have a supper not much better then theyr dyner.' From the teacher's tone it is clear

that a penny bought no large piece of beef in Edward the Sixth's days ; but I am disposed to think a farthing's worth of such meat, bargained and paid for in accordance with relative values of money and ox-flesh in the sixteenth century, would be quite enough for any fastidious Oxonian of the present generation, before extreme hunger had imparted sharpness to his appetite and robustness to his stomach.

Though the average meat of commerce was tough under the Tudors, it certainly was not more tender under the Plantagenets ; nor is there any reason to suppose that university students in the sixteenth fared less hardly than persons of their degree in the thirteenth century. On the contrary, it is certain that the mode of life, alike at Oxford and Cambridge, became less severe and more comfortable — I may not say luxurious, for of luxury the colleges of old time knew little — in proportion as the schools grew in influence, and domestic life laid aside its pristine hardness and austerity. But long after the development of the collegiate system the ordinary diet of university scholars was not greatly superior to the average fare of thrifty husbandmen or prosperous artisans.

Even so late as Henry the Eighth's time, though equal if not superior to the customary diet of farmers and parochial priests, Oxford fare was so notably

inferior to that of the inns of court—*i. e.* the colleges where the sons of the aristocracy were trained and fed with sumptuousness proper to their degree, and even to the fare of the inns of Chancery, in which the inns-of-court men received their preparatory education—that for a gentleman to adopt openly the university diet for daily use was tantamount to a declaration of his intention to live with stringent economy. ‘But my counsel is,’ said Sir Thomas More to his children after his fall, ‘that we fall not to the lowest fare first; we will not therefore descend to Oxford fare, nor to the fare of New Inn, but we will begin with Lincoln’s-Inn diet, where many right worshipful men, of great account and good years, do live full well; which, if we find ourselves the first year not able to maintain, then will in the next year come down to Oxford fare, where many great, learned, and ancient fathers and doctors are continually conversant.’ The fallen Chancellor had himself made trial of each of the three modes of living; but though he looked forward cheerfully to returning to the cheapest of the three, and even to carrying the bag and wallet of a licensed beggar, the university fare of which he spoke greatly surpassed in delicacy and richness the victuals of first dignitaries of Chaucer’s Oxford.

Nor would Young Oxford of to-day, on being suddenly removed to Oxford of the feudal centuries,

conceive stronger distaste for the food and drink put before him than for the other incidents of residence in a principal's inn, and especially for the mates with whom he would be required to live in close familiarity. It would be regarded as a matter of course that he should share a small, musty bedroom with four or five companions ; and unless he should be prepared to pay highly for exceptional comforts --

- to be, in fact, a collegiate parlour-boarder, or, as he is now-a-days termed, gentleman commoner — he would be expected to sleep in the same bed, as well as the sun room, with the irregularly washing hobbledelboys. The common mattress would be stuffed with straw, and its occupants in co-partnership, during the freezing nights of sharp winters, would keep each other unequally warm by huddling together under a single woollen rug. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that our fastidious young friend's first night in Dotheboys' Hall would not be one of refreshing slumber, and that, on emerging from his fetid garret at break of day, he would realize the feelings with which the amateur casual of notorious experiences came forth from his ward after having undergone the most repulsive part of his self-imposed punishment.

Prudence and the self-command begotten by high civilization would perhaps enable him to disguise from his mates the feelings roused in his agitated

breast by their uncouthness and humble aspect ; but in his heart he would rate them as 'an awful lot of cads.' Nor, when the facts of the case and the conventional signification of the opprobrious words are borne in mind, can it be denied that such a severe judgment would be altogether unwarrantable ; for the students of feudal Oxford were strongly and almost universally marked by the peculiarities which fastidious and luxuriously nurtured young men of our own time hold in strong detestation. Here and there amongst them might be seen lads of gentle air and proud carriage, whose personal endowments indicated their honourable extraction ; but at a glance the polite observer saw that the majority of the undergraduates were of the social kind to which he did not belong. Sprung from the commonalty of a period when the outward distinctions of gentle and simple were obtrusively conspicuous, the academic striplings—strangely different from the aristocratic pupils of the London law colleges—proclaimed the humility of their origin and condition by look, garb, manner, voice. Their intonations were broadly provincial ; they had the stooping, cap-in-hand air of human creatures trained and eager to show servile deference to their betters ; and even the richer of them—those who could boast of substantial yeomen for their sires, and never had occasion to beg an alms in the name of Christian learning or borrow a few groats from a benefactor's

chest—were clad in habiliments that roused the insolent curiosity or disdainful mirth of foppish Templars. In the dressing of their hair and the trimming of their beards (for the older of them sometimes had beards) they contrived to be so oddly out of rule as to appear grotesquely defiant of the decrees of fashion. In hot weather they bathed in the Isis for the sake of coolness, but in the cold seasons they avoided the external use of water. They were not remarkable for the freshness of their interior clothing: and I have grounds for saying that any sophist who had been particular to keep his finger-nails clean would have been derided in the schools or the parvise by his fellow-artists for being over-nice in corporeal trivialities.

Seldom possessing means in excess of their actual necessities, and in a considerable proportion of cases unable to pay for their sustenance and instruction in the cheaper inns without the help of charity, the Oxonians of old time had no superfluous cash to spend on diversions. Unlike the students of the London law colleges, who excelled in dancing and knightly sports, and spent much of their abundant pocket-money and leisure in cultivating the graceful arts and courtly accomplishments, whence they and their houses derived their distinctive reputation of courtliness, Oxonians of the ordinary kind patronised no costlier sports than pugilism, archery,

and pitch-bar, and would have incurred sharp punishment had they frequented the schools of dancing-masters, or affected the humours of aristocracy. Those of them who came to the university from distant parts of the kingdom, and had fairly prosperous parents, were wont to ride to and fro between their homes and the university on the little nags which the horse-jobbers of the period provided for the convenience of scholars shortly before the opening and ending of term. But whilst many a scholar never threw leg across one of those cheap ponies, but made his way from school to his father's roof on foot, it is certain that no class of mediæval Oxonians indulged habitually in horse-exercise.

No doubt the boys had their live pets—their pigeons and tiny singing birds, their rabbits and guinea-pigs, in rare cases their toy-dogs and parrots; but it never occurred even to the parlour-boarders of the costlier inns to keep saddle-horses and blood-hounds. Now and then the more lawless of the students broke bounds, and in defiance of stern tutors and sanguinary forest-laws, made poaching excursions in the glades of Woodstock, and shot wild deer at Nuneham or Stanton; but such predatory and perilous excesses were of rare occurrence, and none save the most desperate of academic black sheep took part in them. During term the Oxford scholar of the strictly feudal period was a peripatetic

and houndless being. He had his cheap athletic games on the Beaumont, but he little imagined that the day would come when, Alma Mater's younger children, besides having horses and big dogs—a fashion that first became general in the university after Charles the Second's restoration—would keep packs of hounds, maintain flat-races and steeple-chases, and turn out troops of horsemen for every drag-run, and for the meets of the nearest hunting establishments. It makes one smile to imagine the mingled ire and contempt with which any of the ancient Oxonian schoolmasters would have derided a prediction that in the distant future a considerable proportion of the Oxford scholars would habitually ride with hounds, that it would be no unusual thing for an undergraduate to pay the year's rent of a valuable farm for a hunter, and that a class of tradesmen would spring up who would subsist by letting hacks to undergraduates neither wealthy nor reckless enough to make themselves the owners of saddle-horses.

CHAPTER VI.

ON LEARNING, AND CERTAIN INCENTIVES TO IT. •

THOUGH the dignity of the feudal scholar's life may be affected prejudicially in the opinion of some of my readers by the statement, the obligations of the historic office compel me to declare that the discipline by which the ancient Oxonian pedagogues strengthened the powers and corrected the failings of their pupils, comprised a liberal use of means that have of late sunk into general disrepute. Under the Norman and Plantagenet sovereigns — ay, and under dynasties still nearer this polite and merciful century — the philosophic teacher who, in the heat of professional endeavour, beat his pupil to death with an oaken cudgel was neither rewarded with a term of penal servitude, nor even held up to public opprobrium. On the contrary, whilst his least friendly critics deemed him guilty of nothing worse than an excess of honest enthusiasm, he was regarded by the multitude less as a murderer than as a valiant soldier who had slain an enemy in fair fight.

Of the various means for rousing scholarly ambition known to their profession, the mediæval schoolmasters relied chiefly on the stick. Or, to use precise terms on so grave and delicate a subject, they relied confidently on two species of stick—the one a spoon-like instrument, used to batter and blister the palms of lethargic pupils; the other, a simple, but ingenious combination of nine slender sprays of wood (each spray in honour of one of the Nine Muses), brought into close juxtaposition, and firmly bound to ether with wax-thread at one end, and in the opposite direction expanding with a kind of fan-like extensiveness which, by reminding beholders of the cooling properties of the fan, suggested with cruel irony the warming faculty of the expanding twigs. The former of these scorching contrivances the teacher employed in taking official note of trivial delinquencies, and in imparting a salutary briskness to the atmosphere of his school-room with the smallest possible amount of trouble to himself. For incidental fillips, casual reminders, and passing intimations that things were to be kept lively, the ferule was the thing. But when the instructor was bent on rendering an important service to his class and the interests of learning, he had recourse to the more complicated and perishable implement, and achieved his purpose with proper effect.

I have authority for the statement that peccant

scholars, especially the little Oxonians of the junior grammar-classes who had not acquired the stoical air and method of taking things without emotion, sometimes squealed horribly under the blows of the flagrant besom, laid on by the strong arm of an operator, with a good heart in his work. It is, moreover, matter for record, that in the summer terms, when Alma Mater was at full work with her exercises and disputations, and was bestirring herself with more than ordinary zeal to do her duty by her children, the unlearned citizens and other loafers of Oxford used to congregate beneath the open windows and partially closed doors of the little academies in School Street, for the somewhat malicious satisfaction which they experienced in hearing the whistle of stripes and the cries of sufferers. How prominent a part this primitive method for making young people take to their books played in the scholastic system of our ancestors, may be inferred from the fact that, so late as the middle of the fifteenth century, and doubtless much later, when scholars and bachelors in grammar received licenses to teach grammar within the limits of the university, the chancellor of the schools or his deputy, officiating in the Convocation house in the presence of the whole university, gave to each of the licensed teachers, together with his license, a ferula and a birch. An old order of the academic parliament, noticed by An-

tony Wood, requires that all grammar-masters should 'be obedient to the Masters of Arts, who should be appointed by the Chancellor to oversee and visit the grammar-schools, to the end that the Masters of them should duly instruct and chastise their scholars, and see what things were defective in them.' But for the present enough has been said on an interesting topic to which I shall return in a later chapter, that will bring the matter nearer home to Oxonians of the present day, and may haply cause them to tremble in their shoes for the possible consequences of their own shortcomings.

Of the learning thus imparted to young people by primitive, not to say absurd means, I could say a great deal, but nothing calculated to please those who delight to put mediæval Oxford on nineteenth-century stilts, and to represent that she overflowed with profound philosophy, when she was merely doing prosaic work in an honest and intelligible, though homely, fashion. To those clever and learned gentlemen---(and I am not speaking ironically of their sagacity and erudition, which very likely exceed my own)---who maintain that 'the old Oxonian schoolmasters cherished a sublime ideal of the educator's functions, that they declined to comply with what are now-a-days derided by sciolists as utilitarian considerations, and that they aimed rather at the general elevation of the pupil's nature and the